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THE THEOSOPHICAL FORUM.

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Each member can send questions, answers to questions, opinions, and notes upon Theosophical subjects. When necessary, the various communications will be condensed by the editor. Members will be careful to write on only one side of the paper and to use black ink.

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For paragraphs under the word "Ans." the editor is personally responsible.

June, 1890.

QUESTION LII.

When a spirit reïncarnates in another sex, does it lose any portion of its previously developed sense of justice; or is it only dormant, in a measure, through its later incarnation, by reason of its embodiment in another sex?

Ans.—The laws regulating reïncarnations must bear equally on all faculties or senses, and not alone on that of justice, and equally, also, on the change from sex to sex, so that the Question is really reducible to this,—Does the absence of any faculty mean loss of a previous acquirement, or merely dormancy in the present incarnation?

It seems almost certain that the latter is the fact. We can hardly conceive that any acquirement is ever lost, that any part of the way has ever to be re-trodden, that any ground has ever to be conquered twice. The Ego is to traverse the whole round of development, and each gain becomes part of its capital, the whole sum to be at its disposal when its fitness to dispose thereof is finally demonstrated.

But it does not follow that the capital, as fast as acquired, is displayed in the following incarnation. It may very well be

otherwise, and that some parts are but slightly manifested, some kept wholly in abeyance. This is all the more likely when we remember that the possession of one very robustly-developed faculty might lead to its exclusive use, and so the incarnation be passed without the development of any others. Only an exceptionally firm will could enable a man to forego the use of a faculty wherein he was strong, and to cultivate others wherein he knew he was weak. Nature kindly does this for him, and puts forward for his benefit those departments of function in which he is defective or incomplete. Thus he can, if so he wills, gain successively the mastery of all.

When we see a man greatly lacking some particular quality, either of two explanations may account for it. He may have already acquired it in the past, and it may therefore have been laid aside, stored up, held in abeyance for the present; or he may not yet have reached the incarnation wherein that quality would find fitting cultivation. In other words, that quality in this incarnation would be either superfluous or premature. Which is the true explanation, no one of us can say. An Adept, sensing his aura and seeing his history in the Astral Light, could do so, but not an ordinary man. But even this requires qualification, for it is to be expected that traces of some prior qualities shall manifest themselves, especially at a forward stage of progress; and, again, there are certain qualities—philanthropic, for instance—which could hardly recede entirely from any incarnation. A Confucius could never incarnate later as a Caligula. But a Confucius might lack some trait or discipline acquirable further on, and so, without losing his philanthropy, might return as, say, a Marcus Aurelius.

The bearing of our explanation upon the problem of sex is a more difficult matter. So far as the Forum is aware, the principles regulating sexual reïncarnation have never been expounded by authorities in Occultism, and therefore any answer must be speculative. Nor is there space here to take up the cognate questions which disclose themselves. Briefly, it may be said that the two sexes represent and exemplify opposite qualities,—opposite, not in the sense of "antagonistic," but in the sense of "complementary." An Ego, to be perfect, must ac-

quire both sets, and therefore passes through both experiences. But as development is not in any person absolutely systematic and balanced, an Ego, last time male, now female, may not have fully cultivated all male traits then and may have gained some female, so that now, though the paramount need demands and secures a female incarnation, some male traits are apparent and some female obscured. This would account for certain cases in which women have exhibited a sense of justice but not much need for affection. The converse of the above would be an Ego, last time female, now male, and now exhibiting ardent desire for love, and yet but little of distinctively "manly" traits. These varieties, and very many more in the enormously diversified and complex combinations in human character, would not at all conflict with the general law that each sex has its distinctions and characteristics; nor would they contravene the further law that the sex needed by the Ego is the sex it takes.

Still other possibilities can be read out of incarnations. There may be a worthy quality abundantly well developed, yet needing to be flavored with another, or to be deflected on to slightly different lines, or to be rid of limitations, or to be transferred to a higher plane. The Ego might then incarnate in the sex to which the quality did not belong, and in a personality unable to develop it further on its original lines, so that the result would be a correction or a broadening or a transmutation. Thus a woman may possess an intense desire for progress, but by reason of dependent position or other check lack power to effect it, and this very barrier become the means whereby personal desire is turned into channels diffusing a will-force and an effort towards greater freedom of the sex and of humanity. A man may have absolutely no ambition, and yet a deep craving for responsive affection, though without the fitness to secure it. Then successive disappointments might not kill the power to love, but only direct it into broader fields, making it bless humanity, and without a hope or a thought of reciprocation.

Other illustrations might be given of how one sex rather than the other is adapted to an Ego at a certain stage or under

certain conditions; but they would do no more than affirm the already-intimated objects of sexual reïncarnation; *first*, that the complementary qualities of both sexes should be acquired, *second*, that they should be acquired symmetrically, *third*, that they should tend upward to a region so broad and fine as to etherealize away the grossness of self-love and fit for participation in work for humanity at large. If these are actually the objects, it cannot be that the qualities acquired in one sex-life are permanently lost upon entrance into the other sex-life, for then the process would be endless. It would be Sisyphus over again, and for no reason.

QUESTION LIII.

Is not Fourier's theory that the time between incarnations is twice that of earth-life (based by him on the analogy of sleeping and waking, as we sleep eight hours of the twenty-four, or one-third of our time, and he considered physical life the sleep of the soul) nearer the truth than the ridiculously long period given in "Esoteric Buddhism"?

Ans.—But *is* that period ridiculously long? Does not the phrase prejudge the matter?

To justify an analogy, there must be resemblances constituting an analogy. But it is not clear that these exist here. Sleep for eight hours—with the subsequent sleep of the soul, if you choose—is necessary to recuperate the exhausted powers of the body; but where no body is present and where the soul does not sleep, there would seem no reason for any particular length of stay in the region between incarnations, so far as any analogy bears. Then again, the theory would determine that stay entirely on the length of the preceding incarnation, not at all on its quality or intensity, or on any other facts affecting Devachan. Further, when we allow for the time passed in Kama Loka, especially in the case of persons of fair spiritual condition but with strong earthly ties, the years left for Devachan would seem too few for its proper function. And, once more, such quick returns to earth would multiply incarnations much beyond any apparent need, and bring them into social conditions too

similar. The period suggested seems as much too small as Mr. Sinnett's seems too large.

Though not a matter of practical moment, some light on the causes determining the time between incarnations would be most welcome to students. Very little indeed has been vouchsafed. Mr. Sinnett intimates that the stay in Devachan is proportionate to the merits of the Devachanee. But it is conceivable that other considerations might operate, one of them analogous to that of the Mahatma renouncing Nirvana. A devout, zealous, self-heedless Theosophist—such, let us say, as some of those for many years in patience and sometimes almost solitude laboring for the promotion of Theosophy (the instancing of Col. Olcott being instinctive)—might, one can readily believe, be much more solicitous to return soon and again participate in the work, than to enjoy longtime a bliss which, however well he might have earned it, would be less attractive to him, and consequently a less reward, than the renewed opportunity to help his fellow-men. And, in such case, it would seem rather hard that he should be forced to stay in heaven rather than allowed to return to earth, especially as the latter would ensure a greater general good. It is possible, too, though this case is speculative, that an intensely active, little-contemplative nature might not be so adapted to a subjective life as a converse nature, and so the same length of Devachanic stay be inappropriate. While it might be going far to suppose that such stay can turn largely on a man's own wishes, it seems not unreasonable to suppose that his constitution, and not merely his spiritual condition, may affect it. For the conception of Devachan as a state of reward alone, may be somewhat narrow.

The purpose of Devachan also appears to bear upon the matter. If we regard it as a state in which the preceding life's experiences are digested and assimilated, there must obviously be a vast difference in the length of time needful for different natures. A sluggish, apathetic man, or one who had passed life in dull drudgery or in an unvarying environment, would not require 1,500 years for such a process. They certainly would seem a waste of time. On the other hand, they might not be long enough for a Bacon, a Michæl Angelo, or a Napoleon.

Furthermore, instances of quick reïncarnations go to show that no protracted period is universal. The boy musician, Hofman, is an almost indisputable case of the reëmbodiment of some eminent *maestro*. Now, as he is conversant with the modern system of harmony and the modern orchestral instruments, his previous incarnation must have been within quite recent times,—100 years more probably than 1,500.

These various considerations go to show, *first*, that the time between incarnations ranges from a very small to a very large period, and *second*, that the elements determining it are both numerous and complex, by no means limited to the single one of analogy.

QUESTION LIV.

Is it right or safe for one who has discovered a lead to a mine by one of his psychic senses to search for the mine, even if for a noble purpose? If he does find it, is he not liable to come to grief?

W. Q. J.—It is not the province of Theosophy to furnish pointers regarding mines or stocks, but since the question has arisen it does not seem wrong for one to find a mine by means of psychic sense. The number of successes in that line are very, very few, as psychics generally grossly overestimate the discovery, and often suppose there is a deposit worth going after, when in fact there is only a mere speck of metal. Nor have I ever heard that trouble is likely to result to one who finds a mine or anything else in that way. But at the same time the search for treasure by using the psychic senses is an ignoble pursuit. Yet if accidentally any sense of that sort revealed to me a mine and I felt sure of it, I might seek it. Disappointment, however, generally is the consequence.

QUESTION LV.

After earnest study and faithful application, cannot the average Theosophist come into a connected consciousness of his three planes of existence—Spiritual, Astral, and Material—in the present life?

Ans.—The question would be clearer if the word "con-

nected" was left out, unless, indeed, it is intended to mean "simultaneous."

Of his existence on the material plane the Theosophist has abundant consciousness: he wishes even for less. Of that on the spiritual plane he has consciousness whenever he feels an aspiration, performs a distasteful duty, or makes a sacrifice of self. Undoubtedly this consciousness becomes clearer and stronger as the spiritual nature is allowed freer play and receives more attention. Probably the average Theosophist has no consciousness of the astral plane. He does not see into the Astral Light; the action of unseen forces or beings is not perceived as such; he has no endowment of clairaudience, clairvoyance, or other powers of an astral kind. Very probably his racial and personal peculiarities unfit him for detecting or experimenting with the contents of that plane, and the best authorities are understood to discountenance such pursuits at this stage of his development. Their position is that astral studies are less important than spiritual, that they divert from the true route to enlightenment, that they are beset with dangers of the gravest nature to health of body, mind, and soul, that experienced guidance is indispensable to success, and that in our region such guidance is not to be had. Furthermore, they insist that the true order of acquisition is spiritual knowledge first, astral investigation afterwards. The astral plane is to be safely entered from above, not from below. This seems most reasonable if we remember the purity of heart and motive which are essential to security in that dangerous realm. They are only to be acquired through that thorough consecration of oneself to truth and duty which the same teachers urge as the first step in Occultism. We are told that, all things considered, the Theosophist can best fit himself for future enlightenment by a steady, unremitting effort after self-mastery and after altruistic beneficence.

Now to acquire that degree of subordination of the lower to the Higher Self, that degree of altruism which, in combination, prepare a man for enlightenment on other planes, is no light or quickly-performed task. Most of us enter upon it with some rigidity of established habits in thought and action, and

though it is true that the willingness to enter implies some progress in past incarnations, it is equally true that the very need for the task expresses the distance that we are from its consummation. Hence we may infer that so long a process must over-pass this incarnation, perhaps be continued through many. But if so, the Question is answered. We can *not* in this present life attain a consciousness on the spiritual plane which will either equal that on the physical plane or entitle to prudent entrance on the astral plane.

The subject may be inspected from a somewhat different view-point. The average Theosophist has one department which he knows well, another which he knows slightly, and a third which he does not know at all. If his idea is any equable or simultaneous consciousness, the two latter must be levelled up, while, in accordance with the law in that region, the first must be levelled down. But what average Theosophist has the strength for such a work?

There may, no doubt, be exceptional natures to which these considerations apply less, but the Question is expressly restricted to "average" students.

Still, there is nothing discouraging in the facts. They simply set forth anew the truths that powers are not the main object of our pursuit, that all progress in unmaterial life is of necessity slow, and that we must not expect possessions until we have acquired them.

QUESTION LVI.

Is it not decidedly untheosophical to sneer at any form of religion?

Ans.—Not necessarily. While it is not the fact that "Ridicule is the test of Truth," there is a class of propositions which can be best exposed by the process known to logicians as the *reductio ad absurdum*. Furthermore, there are in various religions dogmas so uncouth or outlandish that they hardly deserve sober analysis, but find fitting treatment in appeal to the sense of humor. Similarly as to certain ceremonies or rites. A Theosophist would probably find diverting rather than impressive the Divine Homage rendered by a Fiji to a crooked stick or a

colored stone as a fetich; and it is not likely that his emotions would be very different before worship rendered to a piece of bread by Christians of the Roman Catholic section. If he found ludicrous the prayer-barrels of Tibet, he would probably find the same element in a Daily Service read by a clergyman in an empty Church. If the account in *Leviticus* VIII of the consecration of Aaron as High Priest by the anointing of his thumb and big toe does not evoke reverential awe, a Theosophist will be apt to sympathize with Dr. Tyng's summary of Extreme Unction in the case of Talleyrand,—"He was greased in his extremities and became reconciled to God." If a jurist could only treat with mirth the proposition that the true method of criminal jurisprudence was to execute an innocent person and release the guilty, why should a Theosophist be expected to look with gravity upon a like proposition in Theology? If he smiles at the Mahommedan idea that all possibility of right living here, as well as of certain bliss hereafter, is conditioned upon conformity to a certain book, of which much is obscure and much impracticable, must he cease his smile when he encounters the same idea nearer home? Observe—

1st. The sense of humor is one of the choicest possessions in a human being. This is not merely because it opens before him the mostdelightful spectacles in daily experience, or because he perceives delicious incongruities in character, thought, and act which escape the matter-of-fact, or even because of the airy lightness thereby imparted to phases of life otherwise somewhat grim, but because of the protection it gives him against becoming absurd. If this quality was more diffused and strong, it would save from all sorts of follies and extravagances which now bring people into ridicule. It is said that wit has its root in the incongruous. Where the incongruity is not perceived, the wit (or the humor) is of course lost. But where it is perceived, and perceived in advance, the individual can avoid beliefs or ceremonies or doings or situations which would make him a laughing-stock. Hence it is usually found that the adherents to grotesque creeds or philosophies possess little sense of humor, the same being true of undiscriminating partizans, however generally sound their beliefs. Conversely, we find

that friends to rational systems, and the thoughtful and discriminating supporters of any system, are men endowed with a sense of humor more or less keen, and that they suspect unreality the moment they scent absurdity.

2d. A proposition does not acquire sanctity by being called "religious." We cannot take any intellectual averment, label it "dogma," and then taboo it from intellectual treatment. If it is not too sacred to be dispensed, it is not too sacred to be handled. Its claim to reverence lies in its quality, not in its label; and if it is foolish, or unreasonable, or fantastic, or preposterous, it will no more be saved from being made fun of because you call it "religious" than if you had called it "scientific." Also, Theosophists have as unrestricted right to intellectual tools as anybody else, and it would be rather a sorry state of things if a man, on becoming F. T. S., parted from one of the most important faculties of his make-up, the one, too, which is especially valuable for keeping him out of absurdity. And all this shows, still further, that Theosophists must not expect for Theosophy an immunity denied to every other religion, and that, if they put forward notions essentially ludicrous, some one with a sense of humor, either in the Society or outside of it, will be sure to make use of it.

While, then, Theosophists, no otherwise than any well-bred people, are not at liberty to jeer at the inmost and most sacred feelings of their neighbors, they are not restrained from proper use of a faculty which is invaluable for certain purposes at fitting times, and which can no more be kept out of the field of Theology than out of the field of literature, science, or politics.

QUESTION LVII.

To be consistent in their lives, should Theosophical students eschew animal food, narcotics, and stimulants?

Ans.—This must mean "consistent" with Theosophical teachings or injunctions. But Theosophy has, as to these matters, neither teachings nor injunctions, any further than that counsel to moderation which is found equally in the Biblical text "Be temperate in all things," and in the Confucian

code, of which it is the centre. Theosophy is not a system of dietetics or physiology. It does not impose rules for life upon its adherents, or prescribe their dress or food or refreshments. If we had at every meal to consider whether this or that dish would be perilous to our spiritual advance, or at every purchase of new clothes whether such and such material would endanger higher interests, we should soon be like the woman in Droz's *Monsieur, Madame, et Bèbè* who was uncertain whether meat could be safely eaten on Friday if disguised as fish, and have questions similar to that which agitated thirty years ago the Presbyterian sect,—whether a "professing Christian" could properly wear feathers in her bonnet, or only flowers. It is very natural for sincere people, especially in the early stages of devotion to a new faith, to desire to apply it conscientiously and thoroughly to all departments of life; but, as they progress in intellectual apprehension of its genius, and, still more, as they realize that spirituality is a principle and not a code, they find that there can hardly be any universal laws which bind men rigidly in petty things, and that life on the Mosaic or the Puritan plan would be intolerable. True beliefs free the soul from bondage to superstitions or imaginary obligations: they do not impose new burdens and new shackles. Theosophy excellently illustrates this, for it is so eminently *rational.*

One evidence of rationality is quickness to perceive that Nature is herself rational, and we rational when we respect her. Nature has adapted the food and habits of men to their climatic and other environment. Esquimaux live on blubber and oil, Italian peasants on pollenta and olives. No system of philosophy could make train-oil palatable in Italy, or pollenta nutritious in the Arctic circle. If animal food, which is general in all stages of civilization and through most latitudes, did not express a common want, it would not have acquired a common use. So as to tobacco,—which is probably the "narcotic" had in view. Its almost universal employment by all races, and the readiness of almost all soils to grow it, go to show a common need of humanity and Nature's willingness to provide for it. So again as to stimulants. In some form or other they are found all over the world, and as "libations" express men's

thanks for the boon. They have a legitimate use, like all of Nature's provisions for human wants, and the fact that they are often abused proves only man's perversity, not at all a mistake by her.

Theosophy says to a man: "Your highest part is your spiritual, and you ought to give most attention to that. But you have also a physical part and cannot defy it. It is subject to certain needs in food and surroundings, and these you ought to supply, though not making them matters of absorbing, or even undue, interest. You need also a *sana mens in sano corpore*, and it is idle to suppose that you can have either if you violate the conditions upon which it exists. If your body requires fish or meat, don't suppose that these conditions are met by giving it potatoes or bread. If fish and meat are unsuited to it, don't eat them. Keep to other things. Have, in short, common sense. Theosophy does not recommend foolishness to you, and will not heal you if you become sick from practising it. If you find smoking unharmful and enjoy it, smoke,—in moderation, of course. And, in general, cultivate any habit which you find to promote development of your higher nature, and repress any which intensifies your animal instincts, or clouds your finer perceptions, or renders you careless of others' rights."

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